

Europe Busy Dividing the Arabian Pie

By HUGH WOODSTOCK

WHAT may be regarded as a substantial report has it that a Turco-Arab force has reached Alexandretta, in Southeastern Asia Minor. It does not need to be precisely true today, nor tomorrow; what is both true and important is that there is a movement of combined Turks and Arabs in that direction; that the movement is against French forces; that the trouble dates back to two secret treaties; and that the whole problem, just now thrown into a hurried Anglo-French foreign office conference, affects most thoroughly the spoils of war and quite incidentally the destiny of the Arabs for generations to come.

The story of the Arabian (and particularly the Syrian) fight for independence; the story of the Anglo-French "deal"; the story of the present native revolt against the deal; and the story of confusion brought by recent events on British and French diplomats, are all predicated on an understanding of what is Arabia, and, briefly, its people.

First of all if you take a map, you can draw a line clear across the face of Turkish pre-war possessions from (roughly) just north of Alexandretta (where the Turco-Arab army has advanced) across to the Caucasus. North of that line the Turkish subjects were, to all intents and purposes, Europeans; the territory was practically an extension of Southeastern Europe. But south of that line lie the Arab provinces, with a distinctly Semitic population. The line divides the world of Islam. To the north is the Turco-Persian branch of Islam which takes in the Caucasus peoples, and across the mountains, those of Central Asia, Russia, China and India; to the south is the Arab branch of Islam, including the Persian Gulf, Morocco, Egypt, some of tropical Africa and the East Indian Archipelago.

The "Ottoman Arabs" with which this article deals, speak one tongue, and the territory inhabited by them begins at Alexandretta, the boundary sweeping around and including Aleppo, Mosul and Bagdad, to the head of the Persian Gulf; down the Gulf to opposite the island (British protectorate) of Bahrein, then south to the edge of the British sphere, which is in the middle of the desert, and across to the boundary of the Aden Protectorate, and thus to the Red Sea.

This area falls into three divisions, or zones, all of them clearly marked by individual customs, character and economic situation, but all inter-dependent one on the other. The northern zone is highly cultivable, being that area near the Mediterranean coast stretching from Gaza northward; here there are date palm groves, olives and vines. The second zone is a desert or steppe zone, with occasional oases, and runs south to the Yemen. The Yemen is the third zone, in the extreme south, on high uplands, a tropical country famous for its coffee plantations.

The inhabitants of the northern zone are sedentary—crop-cultivators. In the Yemen they also are sedentary, but without the literacy, economic efficiency and political experience of the northern (Syria) zone; the second zone (steppe) is occupied largely by nomads, who roam from pasture to pasture, although family and tribal federation is developed here.

There is much that is important which might be said of these three divisions, their products, their religious divisions, their political relationship in the past; but, for the purpose of this article, this information is briefly stated as above, and the story picked up at the pivotal point—Syria, which has been shown to be the most advanced politically, and the most valuable economically, of the three zones, and yet remains an integral part of the whole Arabian peninsula; so that, what affects Syria, and the course Syria takes, affects all the Arabs of the area.

It was in the first year of the war that Arabia faintly impressed itself on the consciousness of the world. An Arab Nationalist Committee, representing Mesopotamia and Syria, was formed secretly in Damascus, drew up a program and took it quietly to Husein, Grand Sherif of Mecca. It should be explained that while the Turks held all of Arabia, the Turkish sovereignty in the immense steppe zone was only nominal, except in a few port and blockhouses, along the Hejaz railway, and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, where authority was divided between a Turkish governor and the Sherifal dynasty, descended from the family of Mohammed

and guardians of the holy cities by hereditary right. The Committee suggested to the Sherif that he sound out Great Britain and find out what she was prepared to do toward the freeing of Arabia, in return for Arab military support in the war.

The Sherif negotiated a long time with the British High Commissioner in Egypt, always emphasizing the point that he was not seeking personal aggrandizement, but was acting for a substantial body of representative Arabian opinion. An agreement was reached, of which the details never have been fully disclosed; it did not take the form of a formal treaty, but is represented in correspondence.

As the direct result of this agreement, the Sherif revolted against Turkey in the summer of 1916, proclaimed his independence, soon became King of the Hedjaz, and the focusing point of the whole Arabian scheme for rehabilitation.

Now the original Damascus Committee had in mind neither Husein nor anyone else as a sovereign; had not contemplated any plan for uniting the Arab provinces under a single crown; they realized political conditions in certain parts of Arabia were unripe for much experiment; what they sought was the liberation of all Arabs from Turkey, and the promise that the liberated populations should not exchange Turkish for some other foreign domination, but should be allowed to govern themselves.

WHERE the European powers entered in was in drawing the boundary lines of what should be considered free and liberated Arabia. None of them cared to meddle with Husein; no Christian power would dare to lay hands on the holy cities. But Syria and Mesopotamia, settled countries on the northern border of the Arab area, contained all manner of European interests, and it was here that the difficulty arose between Europe and Arabia, which is making trouble now. The British practically pledged themselves to recognize an independent Arab government in Palestine, but demurred to Arab self-determination in Syria, out of deference to another ally, France.

It becomes apparent, after this lapse of time, that the original Arabian negotiations were made known by Britain to France. There resulted the Anglo-French agreement of 1916, which fitted well enough into the Anglo-Arab understanding, but agreed that France should set up in the territory of the Syrian coast any government she chose (the Arabs still objecting to its exclusion from their control), while France agreed, with respect to the Irak portion of Mesopotamia, that Britain should do the same thing. Then, in the four districts of Eastern Syria and Northern

Mesopotamia, the two Powers indorsed Britain's promise to the Arabs to uphold Arabian independence there, but drew a line across the territory, dividing it into theoretical "spheres of influence." The understanding was that if the Arabs on either side of the line should need political or economic assistance from foreigners the privilege of giving it should be monopolized by France on the one side and by Great Britain on the other.

You might pause a moment here to ponder the tangled skeins which were wound around the Peace Conference, and also meditate on how far these transactions are removed from the American conception of international transactions. Yet the Peace Treaty sets a tacit seal of approval on this and similar deals.

Palestine, Britain and France mutually agreed, should be internationalized.

Now all these things move gradually forward to the moment when Turks and Arabs are facing French at Alexandretta, the outpost of Western Syria.

We have seen how the Arabs, seeking freedom, approached the British, and how the British "took in" their partners, the French, and how, like true allies, the French interests were served in their place and the British in theirs.

The French idea was this: French forces would drive out the Turk from Syria, just as British forces had driven him from Irak (in Mesopotamia); the "Arab Governments," then, in their sphere, would be set up by French political officers. Such Arab governments infallibly would apply for French assistance, and then France would have a protectorate in the interior (the so-called "independent" area) as well as direct administration on the area of the Syrian coast.

The course of war changed events slightly. First the Turks crushed the Damascus Committee; then Allenby gradually pushed his way forward, with splendid assistance from Emir Feisal, son of the King of the Hedjaz, both Arabs and French being under the British commander's orders. The French "Syrian Army of Liberation" was a long way off when Turkey collapsed, and Arab flags were flying before they could enter the country.

This looked all right for the Arabs who, with British assistance, and not French, had freed themselves from the Turk; but it looked all wrong for the French, whose plans had missed. Then the British foreign office, working solemnly along the lines of its undertakings, instructed Allenby to order the Syrian Arabs to hand over to the French the provisional administration of the greater part of the zone. Thus to French disappointment was added Arab disappointment. Then Allenby stepped out, and left Arab and Frenchman face to face.

The French immediately ran into trouble; volunteer armies appeared overnight in Syria, there were scimmages in different places, and there was a distinct movement all through Syria to drive the French out. There was some talk of sweeping Feisal out of power, if he showed any disposition to compromise.

So that the case rests thus. The French are anxious to cling to the "spoils of war," and base their claims on historic sentiment.

"Remember," said Clemenceau on one occasion, "that French interests in Syria go back to the Crusades."

The Syrian position is a complete denial that any mandate for Syria is necessary. They claim that self-government is being vouchsafed to people far less fitted for it than themselves. There also is a distinct Syrian fear that French policy will break up the new national movement in Syria, perhaps deliberately in order to "divide and rule."

There is an even more ominous division; the division between Moslems on the one side and Catholics on the other. France expected the Syrian Catholics to come to her support. Few did; most of them devoted themselves to Syrian national unity. The Syrian finds religious sympathy in the Turk and there you have a Moslem people on one side and Latin Catholic people on the other.

Does not this tangled story of self-interest throw a bright light on the methods of old diplomacy—the era the world hoped was dead? How many, we may ask ourselves, of these present difficulties, disappointments, and festering sores are due to the mischievous meddling of selfish powers, exercised through the secret treaty?

A Glorious Easter Sunrise



EASTER sunrise! The world over, millions of Christians greet the day with a profound feeling of renewed life, strengthened in the belief that He who rose, still reigns. Services of veneration and beautiful, or more remarkable custom than that with which the Southern Californians greet the dawn of each Easter. A short ride from Los Angeles is Mt. Rubidoux, its head towering into the skies, and it is on the summit of this mountain that the people from near and far gather in the heavy darkness of the Easter morning to greet the sunrise from the mountain-tops. The idea of the service was started back a year ago when the Spanish Missions were settling the new land along the Pacific, and still continues a yearly custom though the service has not the strict religious aspect that it once had. The listening crowd will hear beautiful prayers especially written for the occasion and spoken by eminent divines, a singer famous on two continents will pour out her golden song, and there will be a short sermon which the listeners may carry with them through the year to come.

Then, when the sun is scarcely high enough in the heavens to light the way, these modern pilgrims who have left their comfortable beds to worship on the mountain-top, go slowly back to their homes—refreshed by the spiritual and physical beauty that has surrounded them.